

NDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1990

Letters

Gorbachev Steers Middle Course on Lithuania

To the Editor:

In "To Oslo, Via Vilnius" (Op-Ed, Oct. 17), John Budris says that few in Lithuania celebrated news of Mikhail S. Gorbachev's Nobel Peace Prize.

President Gorbachev's embargo of Lithuania, an action usually considered a form of economic warfare, was a moderate course. The policy signaled his refusal to yield outright to secessionist pressures, while he avoided a costly exercise in martial law and presidential rule. Moreover, it was probably the only course that would not jeopardize perestroika.

The imposition of an economic blockade to force Lithuania to follow the rules on seceding allowed Mr. Gorbachev to tell the left that he did not oppose secession (as long as it was handled legally) and to show the right that he was not about to let Lithuania (or any other republic) walk away from the Soviet Union.

Paradoxically, despite the damage to Lithuania's economy, and the delaying of Lithuania's sovereign aspirations, the imposition of an economic blockade will be seen as a good policy. By not imposing presidential rule, by not using the military to crush "counterrevolution" and by preventing the Soviet Union from imploding into chaos, President Gorbachev has increased the likelihood that the political and economic gains of perestroika will continue. By choosing embargo, Mr. Gorbachev has kept the Soviet Union on the path of peaceful reform — social, economic and political.

How should we judge Mr. Gorbachev's Lithuanian policy? Winston Churchill supposedly remarked that he did not become the king's first minister to oversee the dismantling of the British Empire. In this same vein must Mikhail Gorbachev's ac-

tions on Lithuania be seen. As the first President of the Soviet Union, he designed his Lithuania policy to promote and protect the policy of perestroika, thereby assuring that the first Soviet president would not be the last.

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Utica, N.Y., Oct. 23, 1990

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